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THE COUNTERSTROKE

By AMBROSE PRATT

Author of "Vigorous Daunt, Billionaire."

(Continued.)

The tapping recommenced. Lord Crossingham evidently crossed the room and drew aside some curtains. "It breaks my heart," he almost groaned, "but I must ask you to wait here; it is my dressing-room."

"But—there is no other exit?"

"None."

"Through that door there?"

"My bedroom; there is a man in it already."

"A man?"

"Ah, trust me a little, Miss Elliott. I am less black than I appear."

She gave him a burning glance.

"Madame waits," she said, her voice full of bitter satire. He fell back, and she closed the door in his face. The tapping was louder now and more impatient.

Drawing the curtains in place again he swiftly and noiselessly returned to his chair before the fire.

"Come in," he called in drowsy tones.

The handle was tried. "I can't," replied a voice without.

Crossingham got noisily to his feet, and stumbling to the door pushed aside the latch.

"A thousand pardons," he cried; "I fancy I must have been dozing."

"Dozing! you slept like the dead, my boy. I have been hammering here for quite a time."

Crossingham rubbed his eyes and pretended to yawn. "I'm awfully sorry," he said sleepily.

The Countess swept into the room and round it with long, undulating strides, shedding coat, cloak and wraps to the floor as she proceeded. The man leisurely followed her, picking up each article in turn.

Madame was now apparelled like a queen. A splendid dress of shimmering jet work on a ground of black brocade enveloped her majestic figure tightly, and above it her alabaster shoulders and milk white bosom shone forth in bold relief. A single band of diamonds embraced the rounded column of her neck, and from her corsage swung a chain of brilliants almost to her knees.

Proudly conscious of her beauty, she faced the man as a queen might her subject; a moveless, faintly scornful smile upon her lips. "Well, my boy, I've taken the measure of your English baby-face."

Crossingham shrugged his shoulders. "And then?"

"Bah, I am not jealous any more. She is pretty, yes, and good—good, all English women are pretty and good. She may be even a little more so than the rest, but she could not content you, Frank— for long. She is too cold, too sensible, too much always conscious of herself, too proud, too self-restrained. Did you ever think she could love you, Frank?"

"Ha, ha! My poor boy, it makes me laugh to think of you married to that woman. You would love her for a week, and then—bah, you would freeze and come to me to warm you back to life again. What does she know of love? I know her, I tell you, and her class. Bah! you are blushing like the girl herself if she could hear me. I tell you—"

"Stop. I forbid you—"

"Why should I stop? I am a woman of the world, and you—do you fear to hear these things? Do they shock your English prejudices? Ah, believe me, Frank—that girl, I tell you—"

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Still she smiled. "Frank, dear, you are wrong; really you are wrong. I think I know what you mean; you saw me last Thursday night." Crossingham seized upon the chance: "Yes; last Thursday night, Madame. Little did you dream that I was by." "You saw me bid farewell to a man at my own door; was that wrong of me?" "But at what an hour, Madame!" "It was late—"

"Morning, Madame!" "Even so, Frank, dear, presently you will go on your knees to me and ask me to forgive you; and I—"

"And you, Madame?" "Will not forgive you, dear, unless you trust me now." He folded his arms, biting his lips to force himself to keep up the cursed comedy. "I cannot."

"Then ask me what you wish." "Who was that man?" Madame facing him, always smiling that strange mysterious smile, caught up her cloak from the chair beside her and threw it on her shoulders, then her wrap, while Crossingham stood idle, stiff, and still. "The man—Madame glided slowly to the outer door—"was my own father," she paused. Crossingham uttered a queer choking cry, so great was his surprise: "Your father!"

"I have said it." Crossingham threw out his hands. "I don't believe you!" he said brutally. Madame all smiled. "I love you, Frank, but do not try me too far. I shall go now. No; don't come near me; your touch would burn. I am almost hating you. Remember, you have called me liar—twice. To-morrow, come to me with your apology. Perhaps I shall forgive." She gave a great sob. "Ah, Frank, how could you—how could you dare insult me so?"

With a swift movement she threw open the door, passed, and was gone. Crossingham listened dumbly in the silence to the patter of her footsteps on the passage. He heard her falter on the stairway, fumble with the latch below, and presently the strong door's creaking closed. Then he staggered, rather than walked, to his bedroom. Oeltjen was standing just within the threshold. "I shall show you to your room now, if you please."

"Very well, my lord," said Oeltjen. "I should, however, tell you that I have been listening to your conversation." "Indeed, and you approve?" Crossingham spoke very loudly, hoping that Miss Elliott would hear. He had conceived the sudden wild hope of attempting to exculpate himself in her eyes thus. "I think that you went a little too far. You are acting, however, was on the whole superb."

"Thanks," drily. "My fear is, however, for the morrow." "You fear what?" "That in a colder moment she will know better how to guard her secrets. Even tonight she was careful to disclose no name. She said 'my father,' only 'my father.'"

"True." (To be continued.)

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TREASURY BOARD

Recommend Fortnightly Pay-Discuss School Board Matters, etc.

The monthly statement submitted by the chamberlain at the regular meeting of the treasury board last evening, showed that the expenditures in the various departments would be fairly within the estimates. There will be quite a deficit in the ferry department, and the board of works will have a small balance on the wrong side, but the safety board will be in the vicinity of \$5,000 to the good. It was decided to recommend to the council that all officials and employees now being paid monthly should be paid bi-monthly after Jan. 1. It was shown that the efforts being made to collect arrearages in taxes were proving very satisfactory.

A committee was appointed to look into the matter of four months' arrearages due the school board.

The sub-committee on the question of wharfage rates at Sand Point recommended that no change be made from last year adopted.

Applications from James Toole for an increase in salary from \$800 to \$1,000 a year, and from George McKinney that his salary be increased to \$70 a month, were referred to the salaries committee to report to the council. Both applicants are employed in the chamberlain's office.

A report and bill were received from Inspector Dalton for his recent trip to Boston on the dredge inspection. The bill amounts to \$134. It was referred to the board of works.

The chairman reported that since Mr. Lingley had taken hold of the collections for arrearages in taxes over \$2,000 of default taxes had been received. He thought the efforts being put forth were having a good effect.

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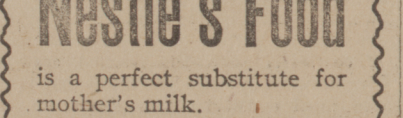
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St. Andrew's Society

The annual meeting of the St. Andrew's Society was held last night in Oddfellows' Hall, there being a very large attendance of members. The following officers were elected for the ensuing year: President, Charles K. Cameron; first vice-president, Dr. J. R. McIntosh; second vice-president, A. Gordon Leavitt; historian, Alex. Wilson; secretary, C. F. Inches; treasurer, John White; chaplain, Rev. David Lang; committee of charity, Dr. P. R. Inches, R. B. Paterson, Andrew Malcolm; marshals, Charles W. Bell and J. Harry Robertson. The following were elected auditors: John P. McIntyre and R. B. Kesoon.

The society decided to have a "Scottish night" on the evening of St. Andrew's day, but it was not decided as to where this will be held. On the Sunday preceding St. Andrew's day the society will attend service at 4 p. m. at St. Andrew's church, the sermon for the occasion being preached by the chaplain, Rev. David Lang.



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Judge Barker arrived from Fredericton yesterday.